

German Reformed Church (Christ Reformed Church)
Main Street
Alexandria
Huntingdon County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5412

HABS
PA,
31-ALEX,
14 -

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GERMAN REFORMED CHURCH (Christ Reformed Church)

HABS No. PA-5412

Location: Fronting 120' on the south side of Main Street, the church lot is approximately 20' west of Church Street, Alexandria, Porter Township, Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: Christ United Church of Christ congregation.

Present Use: Church.

Significance: This church has been the focal point for religious and social activity for many residents of Alexandria from the middle of the nineteenth century to present, a prominence evidenced by its location on Main Street. Stylistically it represents a modest Greek Revival church design that has remained largely unaltered.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Built 1849, consecrated 1851.
2. Original and subsequent owners: On April 13, 1846, John G. Stewart conveyed a lot of ground to Benjamin and John Huyett, in trust for the Reformed congregation (Africa, 434). The German Reformed Church congregation erected the building in 1849 and has owned it since, though the name has changed over the years.
3. Original plans and construction: No original plans or drawings have been located. Originally the church was a brick, Greek Revival-styled building; the bell tower was added soon after construction of the main block. The windows are placed into four recessed panels demarked by plain brick pilasters. It has four tall two-over-two-light double-hung sash on the second-story of the east and west side-wall facades. A small rectangular two-over-two-light sash is located below each of these, on the first-story. The three-bay front facade includes a central set of double paneled doors; vertical sash like those on the side facades flank the doorway, below which is a blank, recessed panel. An early photograph shows the churchyard surrounded by a low iron railing with a gate before the door (which had no stoop before it).
4. Alterations and additions: A frame, exterior bay-like addition behind the pulpit, placed approximately 15' up the south wall, was added to illuminate the interior somewhat; this wall was originally without windows or it contained the two stained-glass side windows that are now on the shallow west and east sides of the addition. The addition rests on iron poles that support an iron beam. A doorway directly below the pulpit bay has been bricked up.

A one-story frame shed is attached to the southwest corner of the building. A brick exterior gable chimney rises from inside the shed and extends up the south wall of the church.

A modern stained-glass transom panel above the front door reads, "Christ Reformed Church." The dedication stone set into the recessed brick panel above the front door originally read "German Reformed Church 1851," but the word "German" was reportedly chipped away during World War I when anti-German sentiments ran high.

- B. Historical Context: The German Reformed and Lutheran congregations in the area surrounding Alexandria (including Water Street, approximately a mile and one-half west of Alexandria) built a meeting house in Shaffersville about 1817. Between 1843 and 1852, under Reverend Samuel H. Reid, the Water Street charge was divided into three new congregations: Keller, Sinking Valley, and Alexandria. They functioned independently, but under the same ministerial direction (Africa, 434). The reorganization may have been spurred by the prosperous canal era of the 1840s, when membership increased substantially.

The lot on which the building now stands was previously occupied by the Hartslog Presbyterian Congregation from 1825--when it built a brick church on the property--until 1831, when the congregation moved to the White Church in Alexandria (see ALEXANDRIA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH). The first brick church building was sold to James Wilson in 1833, possibly for use as a store (Harshbarger, 27-28). It was probably gone by 1846 when the German Reformed group purchased the lot from John G. Stewart. The present church, constructed to house 500 worshippers, was begun in 1849 (Africa, 434). Records of 1852 for Alexandria show that the church and its one-quarter acre of land was tax-exempt.

The Reformed parsonage lot was purchased in 1846 or 1850 (sources disagree), three lots east of the southeast corner of the town square, on what is now Shelton Avenue (Harshbarger, 43).

Many members of the Alexandria church belonged to the Harnish, Isenberg, Neff, and Piper families; the names that appear in the churches' stained-glass windows. In 1881 the church trustees were Henry G. Neff and Benjamin Neff; the church council that year included Benjamin Neff and Benjamin Isenberg as elders, Henry G. Neff as deacon, and Benjamin Isenberg as superintendent of the Sunday school (Africa, 434).

By 1881 the facility was known as Christ Reformed Church (Africa, 434), the name that appears above the front-door transom.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This is a modest, Greek Revival-style two-story brick church with a bell tower atop the pedimented front gable.
2. Condition of the fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 43' x 62'.
2. Foundations: Stone, with a two-brick stringcourse on the east and west facades.
3. Wall construction: Brick, running bond on the front, north facade; five- or six-course common bond on the east, south, and west walls. Brick pilasters and recessed panels articulate the four-bay east and west facades and the three-bay north facade.
4. Structural system, framing: Load-bearing brick.
5. Porches: The front entrance features a raised brick landing bounded by a modern iron railing.
6. Chimneys: A brick exterior chimney rises from the southwest corner of the south wall.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The front door is a solid wood recessed double door with six panels and a stained-glass transom that reads: "Christ Reformed Church." The recessed casing that extends up beyond the transom about 2' has four vertical panels. A wood lintel is set into the brick above the door.
 - b. Windows: All windows are two-over-two lights. The second-story fenestration is vertical stained-glass in wood, double-hung sash; these also flank the front doorway. Smaller two-over-two-light sash are located below the second-story windows and the side facades. The stained-glass window on the southwest corner is covered with six-over-six-light protective glazing. Some original shutter hardware remains on the lower windows.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Gable-front with asphalt shingles.
 - b. Cornice: The molded wood cornice is unadorned.
 - c. Dormers, towers: The Greek Revival hexagonal bell tower with a metal-sheathed domical roof has round-arched openings on each of its six sides. It rises from atop a square wood base at the roof ridge on the north gable.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:
 - a. First floor: Two doorways that lead into classrooms border the south side of the entry hall, which is about 13' deep. A wall divides the first floor (north to south). The east half contains three rooms with doorways along the west wall. The opposite side is partitioned into three rooms by folding curtains.
 - b. Second floor: The sanctuary occupies the second floor. The altar area and pulpit are located in the south recess, which is framed by a Tudor-arch opening. Fifteen rows of pews divided by an aisle fill the room, including four rows of pews against the north wall that are stepped upward on risers. The organ is in the southwest corner.
2. Stairways: A pair of closed-well stairways lead from the entry up the north wall, along the west and east inside walls to a landing, and then south to the rear of the sanctuary.
3. Flooring: Wood.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster. The ceiling is highly decorated with coffers and circular patterns.
5. Doorways and doors: The exterior woodwork over the entry is recessed and paneled wood.
6. Decorative features: The stained-glass windows throughout the church are alike in color and design, although the names inscribed on them differ. Low wainscoting and molding line the interior wall of the sanctuary. The altar is seen through a Tudor-arch opening.
7. Lighting fixtures: Four brass (electric) chandeliers are suspended from the ceiling, one in each corner of the sanctuary, respectively.

- D. Site: The church lot is in the town center on the south side of Main Street, a major thoroughfare. A gravel parking lot is located west of the building. The church is surrounded by houses on the east and west; north across Main Street is a home for elderly persons; and south of the building are fields. A short hedge borders the north and east flanks of the property.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Old views (in Hartslog Heritage, 44 and 69).

B. Primary and unpublished sources:

Porter Township tax records, 1819 to 1859, Huntingdon County Historical Society.

Alexandria Borough tax records, 1859 to 1873, Huntingdon County Historical Society and Huntingdon County Courthouse.

Huntingdon County Deed Books and Probate Records, Huntingdon County Courthouse, Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

Huntingdon County Tax Map -- Alexandria, 01-01-62.

Huntingdon County Historical Society survey sheets.

C. Secondary and published sources:

Africa, J. Simpson. History of Huntingdon and Blair Counties, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia: Louis H. Evert, 1883.

Harshbarger, Jean P., Nancy R. Taylor, Sara H. Zabriskie, and F. R. Zabriskie. Hartslog Heritage. State College, Pennsylvania: K-B Offset Printing, Inc., 1975.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was conducted by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record in cooperation with the America's Industrial Heritage Project under the directorship of Randy Cooley; AIHP is an undertaking of the National Park Service, based in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. Recorded under the direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, the project was completed during summer 1988 at the HABS field office in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Project leader was Alison K. Hoagland, senior HABS historian; field supervisor was Dorothy Burlingame, University of Vermont; project historian, Karen Genskow, Sangamon State University. Large-format photography is by David Ames. Editing of the final report was done by Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.

This report was completed as part of a larger project documenting two canal towns--Saltsburg, on the Western Division of the Pennsylvania Mainline Canal, and Alexandria, on the Juniata Division--flanking the Allegheny Divide. Twenty-one reports on other buildings in Alexandria, an overview history of Alexandria (HABS No. PA-5407), and of canal town development in Pennsylvania (HABS No. PA-5666) are part of the HABS/HAER collection. Twenty-two reports on buildings in Saltsburg (Indiana County) and an overview history of Saltsburg (HABS No. PA-5438) are also available. Results of the project were published as Two Historic Pennsylvania Canal Towns: Alexandria and Saltsburg, Sara Amy Leach, editor (Washington, DC: Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, March 1989).